DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 703 CG 011 289

AUTHOR Payne, Paul A.
TITLE Training in Help Giving Skills in a Psychology of Adjustment Class.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association (84th, Washington, D.C. September 3-7, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Behavior; *College Curriculum; College Students; *Empathy; Friendship; *Helping Relationship; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Peer Counseling; Psychological Patterns; *Psychological Services; Research Projects

ABSTRACT

Based on the evidence that college students are their own primary resource for psychological services, a training program in help-giving skills was developed as a supplement to an academic course in the psychology of adjustment. Training for 73 students involved readings, lectures, modeling, and experiential learning in small groups. Pre-post measures included reported help given and received, a situation type of empathy test, and two global measures of adjustment--self-rated overall adjustment, and rated severity of three personal problems. Following the course, students evaluated the training with respect to attempted use and perceived usefulness of the training. Results indicated a significant increase for level of empathy. Also, significant changes in the direction of better adjustment were reported for the two adjustment measures. These pre-post changes, as well as student evaluations of the program, were interpreted as supportive of the training of help-giving skills in the classroom context. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED137703

Paul A. Payne
Cincinnati, Ohio

TRAINING IN HELP GIVING SKILLS IN A PSYCHOLOGY OF ADJUSTMENT CLASS

Although the primary focus in counselor training has been the preparation of professionals, in recent years considerable attention has been given to the service potential, and thus the training, of nonprofessionals as well. In particular, the service potential of college students has been explored. Reviews of the literature (Gruver, 1971; and Skovholt, 1974) indicate that college students can be effective in dealing with such diverse populations as hospitalized mental patients, problem children, and juvenile delinquents. However, an even larger potential may involve the informal help-giving that students provide to one another. Armstrong (1969) and Christensen & Magoon (1974) found that college students name friends rather than professional therapists as the preferred and most frequently sought resource for dealing with their own personal problems. In analyzing such discussions between friends, however, Martin, Carkhuff, & Berenson (1966) found levels of empathy, warmth, congruence, etc., to be quite low. Since these helper characteristics have been related to success in psychotherapy, training may be needed if this informal "friendship" counseling is to be more helpful. While most training of volunteers has involved more extensive and time consuming programs, training analogue studies demonstrate that some therapeutic characteristics, e.g., empathy, can be appreciably increased in very brief

CG011289

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

training using didactic and modeling techniques (Payne & Gralinski, 1968; Payne, Weiss, & Kapp, 1972; Payne, Winter, & Bell, 1972). Thus, the need, the potential usefulness and the means of training would support the attempt to improve the informal help-giving skills of college students. Additional support for such training comes from evidence that training and experience in help-giving can be therapeutic for the helper (Gruver, 1971; Skovholt, 1974).

In the present study a training program in informal psychological help-giving was developed as supplemental to an academic course in the psychology of adjustment. This training represented an extension of techniques developed in the training analogue studies noted above. Training was modified, however, for classroom application using a format involving multiple small groups with student trainers. A situation type of test as well as a variety of self-report measures were utilized for assessing the effects of this training program.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 73 undergraduate students enrolled in a three hour psychology of adjustment course at the University of Cincinnati. They were 40% sophomores, 37% juniors, and 23% seniors. College representation was 78% Arts & Sciences, 15% Education, 3% Community Services, 4% other colleges. Ages ranged from 16 to 33 (M=20.3). 42% were male; 58% were

female. Previous credit in psychology ranged from 3 to 53 quarter hours (M=12.8).

Course Structure

The helping skills component of the course was developed as supplemental to an academic course in the psychology of adjustment. For this helping skills component, lectures presented Rogerian theory, case illustrations, and research, and covered a period of about three weeks in the academic quarter. Readings included a chapter on humanistic psychology in the text by Coe (1972). Tapes by Rogers (no date given) and Gordon (1964) were used for demonstration and modeling.

For more experiential learning, the class was divided into small groups of eight or nine and an undergraduate leader was assigned to each. These groups met for one class period per week for five weeks. Five leaders had completed the course the prior academic year and were serving as group leaders for additional academic credit. Three leaders were recruited from within the class on the basis of interest and prior group experience and did the course work concurrently with their work as small group leaders. Leaders met with the instructor for two hours weekly to discuss objectives, become familiar with materials, and to role-play tasks they would be presenting to their group that week. Practice exercises in small groups included: multiple choice responses to problem statements, the use of Carkhuff's (1969) empathy scale, the writing of responses to problem statements, and

assuming the roles of helper and helpee. Discussion and role playing concerned the setting of limits to informal help-giving, recognizing when being empathic might not be helpful, and the making of referrals to professional resources.

Measures

Pre-post questionnaire. The first week and again the last week of the academic quarter a questionnaire was administered which represented the areas of informal helping and overall adjustment. In the area of informal helping, items included self-reported behaviors (number of hours and number of people over the past three days) in help-giving and receiving. In the area of general adjustment, items included: (a) brief descriptions of three personal problems and their self-rated severity, and (b) self-ratings of own overall adjustment.

Pre-post empathy test. Paper and pencil forms of a situation test used in prior training studies (Payne & Gralinski, 1968; Payne, Weiss, & Kapp, 1972; Payne, Winter, & Bell, 1972) were developed. This test presented statements of a college student discussing a variety of problems--grades, roommate, parents, professors, and loneliness. There were two forms of the test with six client statements each. Form A was given first to half of the students while form B was given first to the other half. Each client statement was printed on a separate sheet and subjects were instructed to write what they would say if they were trying to convey

empathy to the student expressing the problem. Subject responses to form A and B were randomized such that the four independent judges had no way of knowing whether pre or post responses were being rated. Carkhuff's (1969) revised five-point empathy scale was used for rating levels of empathy. Each set of six responses was given an average rating by each judge and the four judges' ratings were averaged for each trial of each subject. Thus, each subject had two averaged ratings, one for the pre-responses and one for the post. Reliabilities of the averages of the four judges' ratings were .94 for form A and .92 for form B (Winer, 1962, pp. 124-128).

Course evaluation questionnaire. At the last regular meeting of the course a questionnaire was administered with which students evaluated the helping skills training they had received. Items included frequency of attempted use and judged effectiveness of the training. In judging the effectiveness of the training in helping skills, students evaluated these methods relative to the methods they used prior to the course.

Results

Pre-Post Comparisons

Effects of training in the area of informal help-giving were assessed by pre-post measures which included reported helping and scores on an empathy test (Table 1). It will be noted that there were no significant changes for reported

Insert Table 1 about here

behaviors in help giving or receiving. However, highly significant increases were found on the test of empathic ability.

Course Evaluations

Following training, students made evaluations concerning attempted use and judged effectiveness of the training. The average rating for attempted use of the techniques covered by the training in helping skills was 2.45. On this 4-point scale a 2 referred to "occasional use" while 3 referred to "quite a bit of use." In terms of percentages, 94.5% reported making at least some use of the techniques and 39% reported using them "quite a bit" or "often." Concerning ratings of judged effectiveness, the average rating was 2.97. On the scale a 3 referred to the statement "I used them (the techniques) and felt they represented some improvement over my prior helping methods." Of those who reported trying to apply them, 87% viewed them as representing at least "some improvement" over their prior helping methods, while 25% viewed them as representing an "appreciable" improvement over prior helping methods.

Ratings of Personal Problems and Own Adjustment

Two items assessed more global changes in the area of adjustment. These items were: (a) self-ratings of one's own adjustment, and (b) self-rated severity of three personal problems. For computational purposes, ratings given to the

three personal problems were averaged. It will be noted (Table 1) that self-rated adjustment showed a significant increase from 3.26 to 3.51. On this 5-point scale, 3 referred to a self-rated adjustment of "about average." Average severity ratings of three personal problems declined from 1.98 to 1.50. On this 4-point scale, 2 indicated "a moderate source of concern" while 1 indicated "a minor source of concern."

Discussion

The present study was based upon the assumption that college students are their own primary resource for psychological services and that the most direct way to influence such help-giving is through training, in this case, in the classroom context. The reported data concerning number of people as well as number of hours involved in such informal counseling among undergraduates in the class strongly support the assumption of such widespread informal help giving and receiving. No changes were found in behavioral reports of such helping although the thrust of the course was upon improving the quality or skill involved in these interactions, rather than in increasing measures of quantity.

An objective assessment of skill in one area of helping was attempted by the empathy test. On this measure a highly significant increase was found between the first and last weeks of the term. Although the training was conducted in a classroom and small group context, the gains in terms of the Carkhuff scale were clearly comparable to those achieved

in prior training with college undergraduates using individual supervision (c.f. review by Eigenberg, 1973). Hence, the extension of training procedures developed in training analogues to an applied group setting was successful with reference to the test criterion. This improvement on the objective measure was also consistent with student reports of attempted use of the techniques and with student perceptions of improvement over their prior helping methods.

Although most students responded favorably to the training, objections were raised by some who viewed the training in listening skills and empathy as "put-downs" of their usual methods of helping. Although it was often stressed that listening was only one aspect of effective helping, a number of students seemed to give the training that interpretation. Hence, greater efforts might have helped in minimizing such objections. Longer training as well as the tying of training to participation in other help-giving activities such as visits to nursing homes, or assisting less experienced fellow students in registration and course selection, might have generated a greater sense of relevancy. Involvement may be greater, and less threat may be perceived, if training is directed toward new helpees rather than being directed toward those one has been helping all along.

Prior research and theory have suggested that training and experience in giving help to others may be effective in promoting one's own psychological adjustment. In the present

study changes in the adjustment measures used would be consistent with this "helper therapy" hypothesis. However, additional measures of adjustment would be desirable and other designs would be required to separate the effects of training in helping skills from other experiences which might have accounted for the changes in these adjustment measures.

The training of nonprofessionals and peer helpers has received much attention. Most efforts of this type, however, have been directed towards those who formally volunteer for such programs. The behaviors reported in the present study suggest that informal psychological help-giving is provided by a much larger group of individuals than might be expected to volunteer for a "peer helper training program." Various options might be considered for reaching individuals in this category. The present study offers support for the training potential of the college classroom as one means for reaching this larger group.

Table 1

Pre-Post Measures of Helping, Empathy, and Adjustment

Items	Pre		Post			
	M	SD	M	SD	df	t
Reported helping - past 3 days						
Helpee - people	2.29	1.7	2.26	1.5	64	.11
Helpee - hours	2.38	3.4	2.62	4.5	64	.33
Helper - people	2.81	1.7	2.78	1.9	64	.1[illegible]
Helper - hours	5.96	11.7	3.51	4.8	64	1.70
Empathy test						
Averaged ratings	1.44	.5	2.58	.8	60	11.20***
Ratings of personal problems and own adjustment						
Severity of 3 personal problems	1.98	.5	1.50	.7	63	5.06***
Own overall adjustment	3.26	1.0	3.51	.8	64	2.20*

Note. Variation in degrees of freedom is a function of incomplete data for some subjects.

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$